

2008 Riviera Wonder



Early in the 1950s, Virginia horsewoman Liz Whitney happened to dock her boat during the Long Island shows at a restaurant/marina complex called the Riviera, owned by a former jazz trumpeter, Bernie Mann. When Whitney mentioned to Mann that she was going to sell a colt by her famous jumping sire, Bonne Nuit, out of Winter Rose, the dam of Miss Budweiser, she didn't have to say it twice, and shortly thereafter "Wonder" joined the Mann jumper string.

Whatever the price may have been, the horse was a bargain. Wonder lived up to his name by going on to compile a record of consistent brilliance under the old "touch" rules that has never been matched, and proved that he could beat the best competition Europe had to offer.

As a four-year-old in 1955, the 16.3-hand gray gelding, ridden by Al Fiore, carried off his first National Horse Show Open Jumper title. To prove that it was no fluke, the pair did it again in 1956 and 1957 in an unprecedented triple that retired the coveted Waldorf Astoria trophy. In 1959, Wonder was loaned to the USET and ridden by Bill Steinkraus. Bill promptly helped the team win the Pan American team Gold Medal in Chicago. Accompanying the team to Europe, he started the world by winning the International Jumping Championship of Germany at Aachen, beating the best horses in Europe in the process, and anchored the winning U.S. Nations' Cup team at London. The following year he won the Grand Prix of Wiesbaden and competitions at Lucerne and London, where he also anchored winning Nations' Cup teams. Physical problems may have affected his performance in the Rome Olympics, where he finished only 15th in the individual competition and did not start in the team event.

Returned to Mann after the Olympics, Wonder took up right where he'd left off, winning the National Horse Show Jumper Stake and the Championship for a record fourth time, and going on to win many more competitions (including the National's Puissance in 1961) before he finally stopped showing. Though he was beset by soundness concerns for much of his career, Wonder achieved things no other horse has ever done, and many knowledgeable horsemen still consider him the most athletic jumper they ever saw.